DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 310 794 IR 052 883

AUTHOR Kuhlwein, Wolfgang
TITLE A Socio-Semiotic Way of Looking at Cross-Cultural Lexicology.
PUB DATE 88
NOTE 11p.; An earlier version of this approach was delivered at the World Congress of the International Association of Applied Linguistics (8th, Sydney, Australia, August 1987).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Analysis; *Cross Cultural Studies; *Lexicology; Methods; *Semiotics

ABSTRACT

The first section of this paper outlines the aims of the socio-semiotic way of looking at cross-cultural lexicology, including its ability to affect research methodology, objects, and goals, and argues that it is in accordance with an integral concept of linguistics. In the second section, the socio-semiotic approach is contrasted with the system-oriented, knowledge-oriented, and behavior-oriented views of lexicology. The final section provides macroscopic results, microscopic results, and cross-language comparison to illustrate what cross-cultural lexicology can do under socio-semiotic auspices. (18 references) (MES)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED310794

U S DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

★ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Wolfgang Kuehlwein

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

WOLFGANG KÜHLWEIN

A SOCIO-SEMIOTIC WAY OF LOOKING AT CROSS-CULTURAL LEXICOLOGY[1]

I. WHY? - Raison d'être/aims

1. The legitimacy of the object of research of this study will not be questioned, cross-cultural lexicology enjoying a reputable tradition in both linguistics and anthropological studies. What is less traditional, and therefore open to debate, is our way of looking at our research object: we take a cross-language socio-semiotic view; it should reveal the determining impact exerted by socio-semiotic factors on the ways in which different speech-communities cope with reality (here: that part of reality which we shall choose under III). One such way of coping with reality is by language as one among many semiotic systems with which humans master their environment. The way in which we - and languages - do this, varies across cultures, in other words along social systems. Hence the term 'socio-semiotic' as "indicating a general ideology or intellectual stance, a conceptual angle on the subject" (Halliday/Hasan 1985: 3).

Irrespective of its specific nature, the way of looking at one's object of research, this 'conceptual angle', exerts a general threefold determining power.

IR052883

1 An earlier version of this approach was delivered at the VIIIth World Congress of the *Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée* (*AILA*) at Sydney in August 1987.

1.1 It must affect research methodology to ensure adequacy.

1.2 It affects one's research object via the constitutive power which it exerts on one's concept of reality or even on reality itself.[2]

1.3 It influences, affects, or even determines possible aims of research, including the possible range of finalizations, to which one's results can be put. Which aims may be considered legitimate depends on one's philosophy of science.

1.3.1 A descriptive philosophy of science legitimizes research aims internally, by 'pure' science exclusively - a precarious position, in particular for linguistics as part of both natural and social science.

1.3.2 A normative philosophy of science, on the other hand, admits external, for example social determination of research aims. It has a twofold bearing.

1.3.2.1 It affects the constitutive phase of research, the *causa efficiens*, here the interest in the social determination of the use of a set of lexemes as presented in (III).

1.3.2.2 It affects the finalizing phase of research, the *causa finalis*, here, for example, the teaching of the use of these lexemes with, for example, the ultimate aim of achieving better cross-cultural international understanding.

2. This general threefold determination as exerted by one's 'conceptual angle' calls for a concept of linguistics which grants the scope necessary for an interplay between external and internal legitimization, in other words a concept which replaces the (pseudo-) opposition between theory and application by an integral view, within which internally legitimized theory-formation is encompassed by (at least largely) externally legitimized constitution and finalization.[3] As to the specific nature of the 'conceptual angle', a sociosemiotic one seems to us to be well in accordance with such an integral concept of linguistics.

---

2 From the realm of natural sciences rich evidence is provided for this position by Kuhn (1962, 1981); for the study of language, cf. also Kühlwein (forthcoming a).

3 For a detailed treatment of the integral view as advocated here, cf. Kühlwein (1987a: 60ff.); of its methodological impact, cf. Kühlwein (1985: 133ff.); of the role of external determination and finalization, cf. Kühlwein (1987c: 11-14 resp. 14-21); of constitutive elements, cf. Kühlwein (forthcoming b: section 3.1.1); of some aspects of the internally legitimized theory-dynamic phase between constitution and finalization, cf. Kühlwein (1986).

II. HOW? - The angle(s)

1. To see how the socio-semiotic approach works across cultures we briefly[4] set it into relief against two others.

1.1 The system-oriented view. - Despite valuable lexical field studies, systemic contrastive lexicological studies have remained scarce for three reasons: the problems (a) of semantic primes and universals, (b) of *tertium comparationis* and equivalence, and (c) of linguistic models and procedures suitable for contrastive, let alone for cross-cultural, studies.

1.2 The knowledge-oriented view. - To relate different structures in different languages to corresponding differences in the mind and to differences among the cognitive strategies which cause different types of conceptualization in different speech communities will without doubt have more explanatory power, but we lack the universal grid of cognitions which would be required to serve as the reference point, as the *tertium comparationis*, for a contrastive, in this case for a 'cross-mental', study. Furthermore, it is only via their manifestation in performance that cognitive strategies become accessible. As a consequence, despite recognizing its basic significance for the question of how different speech-communities conceptualize the world, cognitive psychology will not provide an ultimate reference point for cross-cultural lexicology.

1.3 The behaviour-oriented view. - The deficiencies of the system-oriented and of the knowledge-oriented views call for contrastive interactive competence studies - as indicated by a growing number of pragmatic contrastive studies. These, however, frequently make use of pragmatic evidence for the mere purpose of accounting for structures of other, non-pragmatic language levels, for example pragmatics as providing the illustration of behavioural and/or communicative consequences if one gets one's semantics wrong.[5] Furthermore, contrastive purposes would necessitate a pragmatic deep structure to serve as the *tertium comparationis*. Even if such a deep structure could be developed to a sufficient extent, it would - despite a high descriptive power - lack sufficient explanatory power. Why?

---

4 For a more detailed presentation of the implication of the philosophy of science view adopted here and for cross-cultural lexicology, cf. Kühlwein (forthcoming b); for a preliminary model, cf. Kühlwein (1987b: 7-9).

5 For a greater variety of examples, cf. Kühlwein (1987b: 4-7).

Cross-cultural differences, pragmatically described, are, after all, reflections of deeper contrasts on a sociocultural, anthropo-, ethnolinguistic level. Each person, object, or event, about whom/which we communicate, has a potential of latent semiotic properties. Members of different societies/speech-communities make differing choices from this latent semiotic potential - and what is actualized from latency differs accordingly. A property that is semiotically striking to members of one speech-community may well be marked differently by members of a different speech-community or perhaps even fail to catch their attention at all - for example the different semioticity of a woman's bulky stature in a culture in which women are supposed to do most of the physical labour versus that in a highly industrialized culture. Obviously, these processes of semiotic profiling, of semiotization, are reflected/manifested accordingly on the linguistic plane. As seen on an individual basis they can be described as psycho-semiotic processes of cognition. However, as their major variations are not across individuals but across societies, the nature of these processes is of a socio-semiotic kind (after all, members of the same society understand each other's ways of semioticizing reality - more or less, at least).

2. Section (1.3) indicates that the psycho-semiotic and the socio-semiotic angles should not be seen as diametrically opposed to each other. Halliday (1978: 13) observes: "These are two complementary orientations", but carries on: "The distinction between them is rather obvious and simple" (1978: 13). He notices that what makes it complicated is "the fact that it is possible to embed one perspective inside the other" (1978: 13). But which one should be considered to be the more encompassing? Psycho-sociolinguistically, language behaviour has to be considered as an emanation of language knowledge - a view to which Halliday, however, would reply that it would mean "taking the intra-organism ticket to what is actually an inter-organism destination" (1978: 38). "So in an inter-organism perspective there is no place for the dichotomy of competence and performance, opposing what the speaker knows to what he does ... there is no need to bring in the question of what the speaker knows; the background to what he does is what he could do - a potential, which is objective, not a competence, which is subjective" (1978: 38). - Thus, despite recognizing the 'complementarity', Halliday's own 'ticket', actually, is no less exclusive, but fairly rigid and unilinear as well: 'We can only say what we can mean and we can only mean what we can do' - socio-psychosemiotics? Nevertheless, for our purpose of trying a socio-semiotic 'intellectual stance' (cf. above) when looking at lexicology across cultures, it can be adopted, provided, however, we

regard the activity of socio-semiotic profiling as part of doing. After all, language is both nature and nurture.

III. WHAT? - Data, results

1. In order to get beyond the theorizing and postulating stage, the general parts (I) and (II) call for this specific part (III) as a corpus-based illustration of what cross-cultural lexicology can do under socio-semiotic auspices.

1.1 We choose:

- as a cultural sphere: beauty (B) of human beings
- as languages: English (E) and French (F)
- as linguistic realizations: the sets of adjectives in E and F, that are used to attribute B to somebody.

The underlying procedural and numerical data are derived from the semasiological-onomasiological thesis of Nies (1978).[6]

1.2 In the interest of the above-mentioned 'ultimate' aim of coming to better cross-cultural international understanding we should be able to put each actual utterance referring to B into relief against the overall inclination/disinclination to attribute or express B at all in the culture in question, i.e. to assess the degree of its semiotic relevance: the macroscopic view (cf. 2 below). The second prerequisite for a proper understanding of an actual utterance is the knowledge about the specific socio-semiotic conditions that must be met to assign B to somebody in a certain culture, about the specific ways of socio-semiotic profiling: the microscopic view (cf. 3 below).

2. Macroscopic results

2.1 The overall inclination of members of the F speech community towards attributing B is far greater than that of the E one.

2.2 In both speech communities B is attributed much more frequently to women than to men. But:

6 Cf. Nies (1978, vol. I: 4ff.).

2.3 The relation between explicitly and positively attributing [+ B] on the one hand and stating the absence of B equals 2 to 1 for women in the E speech community, whereas in the French speech community it equals 4 to 1 - the E man in the E speech community being characterized by an overall dominance of [- B].

2.4 When it comes to 'true understanding', these differences in socio-semiotic signification will certainly matter beyond simple comprehension. Basically the socio-semiotic thrust of B seems to be greater in F; for this very reason, however, a higher degree of markedness is due to each actual utterance of B in E.

3. Microscopic results

The socio-semiotic parameters that turned out to have the highest discriminating power were: semantic reference (to clothing or body), aesthetic judgment (constitution, perfection, harmony), non-aesthetic judgment as to physiological conditions (age, sex-typicity), psychological conditions (vanity, warmheartedness), and psychosomatic conditions (naturalness, seriousness).

3.1 P1 [± well dressed] vs. P2 [± good physical appearance]

There are mutual dependencies:

- + P1 easily triggers + P2 in F, in particular for women; less easily in E.
- + P2 triggers + P1 even more easily for F women.
- As for men, + P1 triggers the association of + P2 just a little bit more easily in F than in E, and F obviously has a stronger disinclination than E against associating + P2 with + P1-adjectives.

Conclusion: sex-specificity seems to play a considerably more important role for the contrast P1 vs. P2 in F.

3.2 P3 constitution [refined vs. coarse features]

In F [+ refined features] easily trigger + P2-adjectives, [+ coarse features] easily trigger + P1-adjectives. In E + P1-adjectives go with both refined and coarse features with equal frequency - obviously a lower socio-semiotic impact of this contrast. Furthermore in E there is a stronger tendency towards + P2-adjectives despite coarse features.

Conclusion: the semiotic thrust of the contrast refined vs. coarse features seems to be stronger in F.

3.3 P4 perfection [± consummate outer appearance]

In F + P4 is more important for attributing P1-adjectives than in E. On the other hand, in E P4 is more important for attributing P2-adjectives than in F - especially for the E man.

3.4 P5 harmony [± harmony of appearance]

While in F - P5 more or less excludes P1-adjectives completely, this is not so in E. In both F and E there seems to be more leniency with the man than with the woman.

Conclusion: - P5 is more striking for the French speech community.

3.5 P6 age [± looking one's age (middle-age)]

For the F woman + P6 can cause P1-adjectives much more frequently than in E - the E speech community, obviously, being quite harsh towards women who try to look younger than they are. As for F men, in the case of - P6 they are treated more harshly than the respective F woman, but more leniently than the respective E man, who in turn is treated more leniently (i.e. is attributed B-adjectives more frequently) than the E woman.

Conclusion: F being rather generous to the woman, E is somewhat more lenient with the man.

3.6 P7 sexually typical appearance [± feminine/masculine looking]

Both E and F show a high correlation of this property with the attribution of B-adjectives. In addition for the F woman + P7 easily causes the attribution of P1-adjectives.

3.7 P8 vanity [± the intention to impress by a good appearance]

This property primarily affects P1-adjectives in both E and F; it is fairly relevant for the F woman, almost irrelevant for both E men and women.

3.8 P9 warmheartedness [± amiable, warmhearted, friendly]

P9 causes a somewhat stronger reaction in the F speech community, specifically evoking P2-adjectives.

3.9 P10 naturalness [± natural, unassuming vs. well-groomed, cultivated]

For the F woman both + P10 and - P10 easily evoke P2-adjectives. For the F man, the E man, and the E woman P2-adjectives are more easily compatible with - P10 than with + P10, but the respective correlations are weaker than the above-mentioned one for F women. In F there is a significant correlation between - P10 and P1-adjectives, in particular for the F woman.

3.10 P11 seriousness [± serious, earnest vs. cheerful, serene]
This property is of quite low significance for the attribution of B-adjectives in both speech communities, + P11, however, evoking P2-adjectives for F women fairly easily.

4. Cross-language comparison

According to the distinction of the B-adjectives investigated into a group which is compatible with both male and female on the one hand (4.1) and a group which is (highly) incompatible with either male or female (4.2), a cross-language comparison reveals:

4.1 This group of adjectives can be evoked by a far wider scope of

- aesthetic and
- extra-aesthetic judgments in F when women are concerned. In E the respective spectrum is even somewhat broader for men than for women.

Obviously in E the attribution of these B-adjectives seems to follow a more clearly profiled image of the woman as opposed to the corresponding adjectives in French, whose attribution seems to be more strongly oriented according to the specific person concerned; cf. the occasional admittance of absolutely contrary properties for the evocation of these adjectives.

4.2 In F psychosomatic properties obviously matter much more for women than they do in E (naturalness, seriousness/cheerfulness) when it comes to assigning B or not. The same holds true for aesthetic properties in the case of men (constitution, perfection, harmony).

5. Obviously, there is no such thing as complete socio-semiotic equivalence as a reference point for cross-cultural lexicological studies. What might be a socio-semiotic norm in one culture/language might well be socio-semiotically marked or deviant in another despite various kinds of formal, functional or other equivalences. This is the point where our results should be passed on to both the lexicographer and the foreign language teacher.

REFERENCES

Halliday, Michael Alexander Kirkwood. 1978. Language as social semiotic. The social interpretation of language and meaning. London, Edward Arnold.

Halliday, Michael Alexander Kirkwood, Ruqaiya Hasan. 1985. Language, context, and text: Aspects of language in a social-semiotic perspective. Deakin University, Vic., Australia. Ms.

Kastovsky, Dieter, Aleksander Szwedek (eds.). 1986. Linguistics across historical and geographical boundaries. In honour of Jacek Fisiak on the occasion of his 50th birthday. Volume 2: Descriptive, contrastive and applied linguistics. Berlin, New York, Amsterdam, Mouton de Gruyter.

Klegraf, Josef, Dietrich Nehls (eds.). forthcoming. Essays on the English language and applied linguistics on the occasion of Gerhard Nickel's 60th birthday. Heidelberg, Groos.

Kuhn, Thomas S. 1962. The structure of scientific revolutions. Chicago, Univer - sity of Chicago Press.

Kuhn, Thomas S. 1981. Was sind wissenschaftliche Revolutionen? (Schriften der Carl-Friedrich von Siemens-Stiftung. Themen XXXIV. 10. Werner-Heisenberg-Vorlesung, 24. Februar 1981.) Ms.

Kühlwein, Wolfgang. 1985. Linguistic integrality: Research methodology. I.T.L. Review of Applied Linguistics 67/68, 127-140.

Kühlwein, Wolfgang. 1986. The interdisciplinary framework of the theory-dynamic phase in finalized linguistics. In: Dieter Kastovsky, Aleksander Szwedek (eds.), 1311-1319.

Kühlwein, Wolfgang. 1987a. The need for integration of applied and theoretical linguistics: Research objects, research goals. In: Olga Miseska Tomić, Roger W. Shuy (eds.), 51-74.

Kühlwein, Wolfgang. 1987b. Sozio-semiotische Determinanz im kulturübergreifenden sprachlichen Erfassen der Wirklichkeit. In: Els Oksaar (ed.), 1-22.

Kühlwein, Wolfgang. 1987c. Externality and finalization in linguistics. Linguistics as Applied Linguistics (AILA-Review IV), 9-24.

Kühlwein, Wolfgang. forthcoming a. 'Let your science be human': Linguistics as applied linguistics. In: Josef Klegraf, Dietrich Nehls (eds.).

Kühlwein, Wolfgang. forthcoming b. A sociosemiotic view of the grasp of languages at reality: The lexical field 'aesthetic judgement'. In: Kari Sajavaara (ed.).

Nehls, Dietrich, Josef Klegraf (eds.). forthcoming. Contributions to English linguistics presented to Gerhard Nickel on the occasion of his 60th birthday. Heidelberg, Groos.

Nies, Guy. 1978. Onomasiologisch-semasiologische Analyse ausgewählter französischer und englischer Schönheitsadjektiva. 3 vols. Diss. Universität Trier.

Oksaar, Els (ed.). 1987. Sozikulturelle Perspektiven von Mehrsprachigkeit und Spracherwerb. Tübingen, Narr.

Sajavaara, Kari (ed.). forthcoming. Proceedings of the 1986 symposium of the Scandinavian Association of Applied Linguistics. Jyväskylä, University of Jyväskylä.

Tomić, Olga Mišeska, Roger W. Shuy (eds.). 1987. The relation of theoretical and applied linguistics. New York, London, Plenum.